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Land, livelihoods and belonging: negotiating change and anticipating LAPSSET in Kenya's Lamu county

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ABSTRACT

To attract investments in mineral extraction, physical infrastructure and agricultural commercialization over a vast swathe of Northern Kenya, national politicians and bureaucrats are casting the area as being both abundant with land and resources, and as, conversely, 'backward', 'unexploited' and 'empty'. Drawing on evidence from Lamu County, and focusing on the planned Lamu Port and South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, this article contends that such high-modernist and 'new frontier' discourses are usually complicated by the realities on the ground. Based on common perceptions about land and ethnicity, and how these are intertwined with the politics of belonging and redistribution, these realities exemplify complex economies of anticipation – through which networks of patronage, alliance, and mobilization are being created or entrenched in advance of major investments. This article argues that it is these anticipations – more than official designs – that will determine the future direction of LAPSSET, especially in respect to who will get what, when and how, within its promised prosperous future.

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LAPSSET; development corridors; land; belonging; Lamu; Kenya

On 1 May 2018, a three-judge bench sitting in the coastal town of Malindi, Kenya, ordered the Kenyan government to pay \$170 million as compensation for a group of about 4,600 fishermen displaced from Manda bay in Lamu County, the site of an on-going construction of a modern deep-water port.¹ While the Kenya Ports Authority, which is in charge of the port construction, successfully appealed the judgement a few months later, the verdict, which addressed serious issues of concern to a section of the public in Lamu, had noted that the fishermen were not opposed to the new port primarily, but rather the manner in which the wider Lamu Port and South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor – in which the port forms an integral part – was conceptualized and implemented.² In this way, and in following a common trend of local responses in other areas along the proposed corridor, the fishermen's case was not one of *resistance* to the project *per se*, but of attempting to ensure a greater share of LAPSSET's activities, or to direct the project in particular ways that will include local interests, public and private.³ In Kenya, this can be considered the result of wider ramifications of a public language of rights and legal institutions, which

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was given prominence by a constitution promulgated in 2010.⁴ Yet, at another level, the case exemplified the extent to which global discourses regarding environmental conservation, and a related but growing obsession with ‘indigenous knowledge,’ can be deployed by local groups to improve the terms of inclusion within the imagined future of LAPSET.⁵ In sum, this was one example in which the present in Lamu has in recent times been constantly shaped by and remade around LAPSET’s promised future.

Lamu county – whose Amu island, the largest of the county’s 65 islands, was listed as a UNESCO world heritage site in 2001 – is a key node in the proposed LAPSET corridor. Several LAPSET infrastructure components come together in the county (Figure 1): a new modern port of 32 berths, and a planned network of new transport infrastructure consisting of an airport, a series of highways, a standard-gauge railway and an oil pipeline.⁶ There are also plans to construct an oil refinery, a Special Economic Zone, a ‘Growth Area’ and a new metropolis city with the capacity to accommodate approximately 1.1 million people, up from the 2009 recorded population of 112,252 people.⁷ This population growth, it is expected, will be driven by opportunities for industrial, logistics, tourism development. LAPSET planners also hope to leverage these infrastructural developments to boost investments in short and long-term agricultural value chains for agricultural products that are suited to the climatic and geological conditions of Lamu and other parts of the LAPSET corridor.⁸ To support these developments, plans are also underway to create

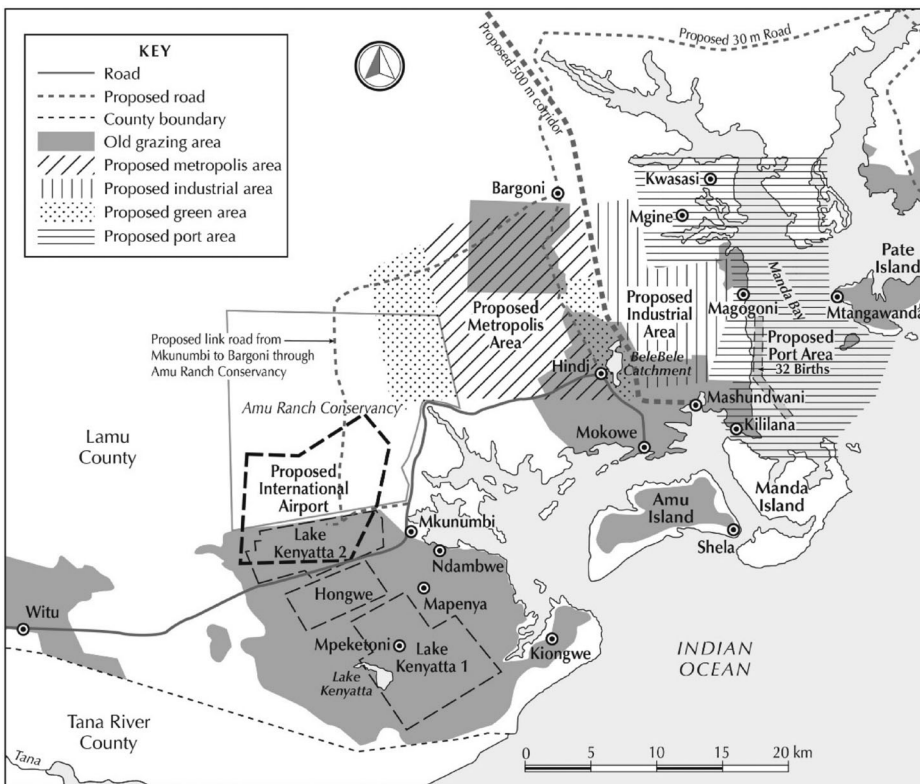


Figure 1. LAPSET in Lamu.

new sources of energy – through a coal-fired electricity generating plant and wind-power farm – and an adequate infrastructure for the supply of water.

Broadly, these projects reflect the high-modernist impulses of their promoters (national politicians and bureaucrats), some of whom genuinely expect that their plans to transform Lamu and Northern Kenya will attract the capital required to create a new modernizing force in the region. As a result, and in a manner similar to Ethiopia's post-imperial statecraft in its pastoral lowlands, LAPSET's framing of Northern Kenya and Lamu as empty (of civilized people and modernity), but full (of resources, especially land and minerals), appears to be legitimating the appropriation of 'underutilized' land, while 'casting the state and its elites as heroes who will make these regions anew.'⁹ Despite the rhetoric, these discursive frameworks – which are accompanied by seductive images of the future of Lamu under LAPSET that exist mostly on paper – are generating anticipations on the ground, whereby LAPSET's future direction is currently being negotiated and renegotiated by a diverse set of actors, through different local processes.¹⁰

Following from this context, this article shows how such economies of 'knowing about', 'imagining' and 'living towards' the future, are underpinning the contemporary political economy of Lamu, shaping relationships of power and consent at different levels.¹¹ By adopting a localized framework within an empirical tradition,¹² the article examines how LAPSET is made, sustained and disrupted in this economy of anticipation. Specifically, the article examines the ways in which LAPSET is shaping and is being shaped by contested meanings of land and belonging, and associated concerns over the fate of diverse livelihoods, as individuals struggle to secure a place in the anticipated modernized and prosperous future of Lamu.

Building on recent work within critical agrarian studies – especially on the impact of land-based investments in the 'Global South' – the concept of anticipation underscores the complex nature of responses 'from below', beyond *dispossession*, *domination* or *resistance*, that arise when capital (and the state) are extended into rural and marginal areas. In this literature, the idea that land deals (or large infrastructure projects) usually expel (or promise to expel) *local communities* from their land, and that those *local communities* usually engage in *resistance*, has been put into question.¹³ This is because, 'when such deals hit the ground, they interact with social groups within the state and in society that are differentiated along lines of class, gender, generation, ethnicity and nationality, and that have historically specific expectations, aspirations and traditions of struggle.'¹⁴ It is these dynamics that produce diverse responses involving a diverse set of actors, with different consequences.

In Lamu, renewed meanings of land as property, driven by the anticipations of LAPSET, are conflicting with meanings of land as a cultural resource, or as ethnic territory. The latter constitutes a widespread ideology in Kenya, where land is inexorably linked with ethnic identity, ideas of belonging are informed by ethnicity, and land and ethnicity have both influenced the politics of redistribution.¹⁵ Conflicting meanings of land, identity and belonging are also projected through ideas of vulnerability and marginality, which have not only been deployed to make moral and legal claims in the context of increasing competition for land and resources, but are giving prominence to exclusivist notions of belonging and citizenship – where commonplace terms such as *wageni* ('guests' or 'migrant' communities) and *wenyeji* ('hosts' or 'indigenous' communities), are being cast in new light, as individuals and groups anticipate LAPSET's future.¹⁶ As

this happens, LAPSET is also intersecting with pre-existing territorial restructuring processes, especially increased sedentarization and intensification of land use, and other claims of community-based land ownership, such as the establishment of ranches and conservancies, that constitute locally-driven mechanisms of claim making on land and resources. It is through such processes that various actors in Lamu are remaking and shaping the present around a diverse and changing future, creating new or entrenching old networks of patronage, alliance, and mobilization in the process. These anticipations, the article submits, will crucially determine the nature of the distribution of economic, agricultural and other resources within the LAPSET corridor, and who will be included or excluded from its promised prosperous future.

Despite their significance in determining the direction of large-scale development, economies of anticipation do not usually feature in influential analyses of development in rural and marginal areas, most of which have emphasized *dispossession* of rural communities, *state domination* (or the expansion of bureaucratic power) and *local resistance* as the main outcomes.¹⁷ The latter has been useful, especially in explaining the politics of development in ‘authoritarian’ contexts where an epistemic rift exists between the cultural repertoires of the bearers of capital and/or state elites, and those of *local communities*.¹⁸ The complexity (of bureaucratic and private investment outcomes in marginal areas) resonates with findings of studies that have examined how the state (and capital) actually works on the ground (especially in democratizing and decentralizing contexts) – suggesting that the operation of multiple interests, actors, and factions usually work to reduce the predictability of political processes at the local level.¹⁹ In this way, and through multiple networks of loyalty and patronage, numerous opportunities are created, mostly for local elites, but sometimes for ‘poor farmers’, ‘rural women’, and ‘pastoralists’ as well – or those tendentiously presented in both academic and popular literature as hapless ‘victims,’ or determined ‘resisters’ of the state and capital.²⁰

In Kenya, local government, and political devolution since 2013, has offered the main theatre around which these politics vividly intersect.²¹ Studies on the consequences of Kenya’s devolved system of government indicate that it has not only fuelled the informalization of the local state, but has also created multiple opportunities for a diverse range of actors.²² It is under this context, of the local disruption of the logics of capital and the bureaucratic rationality of the state, that LAPSET has been debated, anticipated and negotiated by multiple actors with diverse interests, producing complex and varied outcomes.

The empirical foundation of the article consists of 40 qualitative interviews, conducted in January, March, and August of 2018 with Lamu residents: farmers, businessmen, activists, fishermen, local politicians, managers of ranches and conservancies, and women and youth leaders. Other interviews, especially with LAPSET project managers and other government officials, were conducted in the urban centres of Mombasa and Nairobi. This fieldwork material was triangulated with a synthesis of government, media, and non-governmental reports.

The article proceeds as follows: the first section is a historical profile of Lamu, with a view of discussing how recent politics have been shaped by longer processes of migration and land-use change since the early decades of the twentieth century. This section is followed by three others, each examining the renewed meanings of land; of culture and the

fate of diverse livelihoods; and of belonging in the context of the anticipations generated by LAPSET. The article ends with a few concluding remarks.

Lamu: a history of marginalization, settlement and incorporation

Lamu was a thriving religious centre and port city during the nineteenth century, based on trade and slave-run plantation agriculture, with links to a wider Omani-led Indian Ocean trading network.²³ As such, the imposition of colonial rule, and the subsequent abolishment of slavery in 1907, greatly undermined Lamu's political and economic influence, both within the Western Indian Ocean, and within the new colony that shifted the base of power from the coast to Kenya's central highlands.²⁴ As a result, the parts of Lamu's mainland area (Figures 2 and 3), where slave-run plantations had been established,

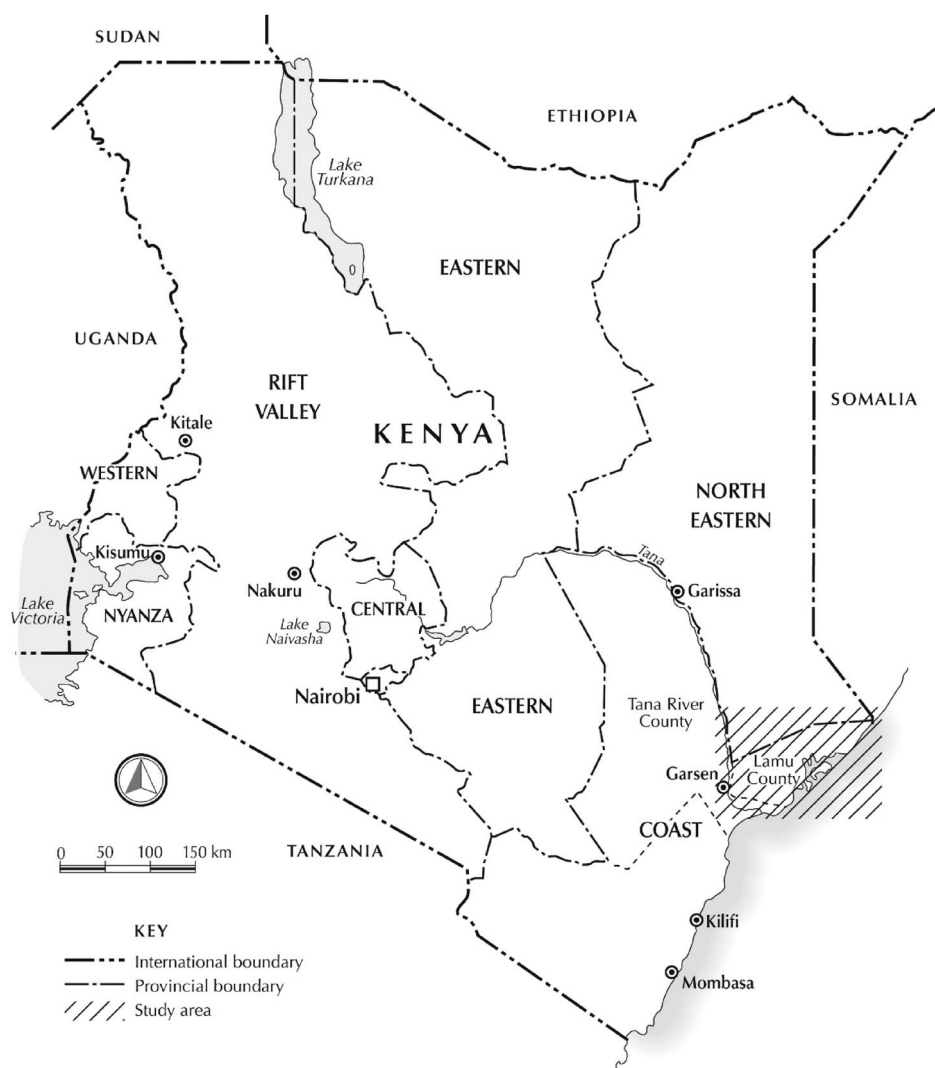


Figure 2. Map of Kenya indicating Lamu county.

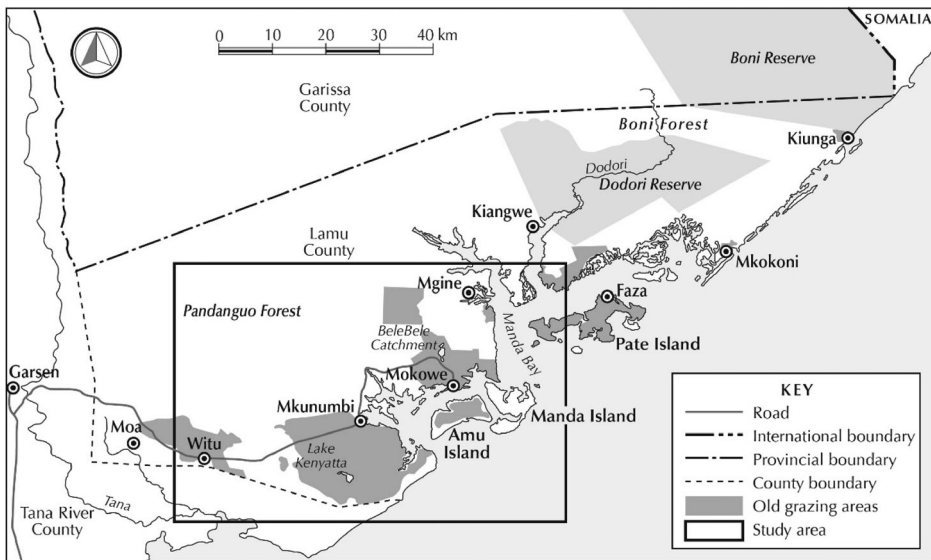


Figure 3. Map of Lamu.

were largely abandoned, and most of the land turned into forest.²⁵ It was not until the late 1960s that Kenya's post-colonial administration initiated plans to establish commercial agricultural enterprises (and later settlements) on the mainland areas, and some parts of the archipelago.

In 1971, the government established a cotton plantation on 1,000 acres of land on the mainland areas near Lake Kenyatta (named after Kenya's first president when he visited the area to open the plantation) but these efforts were complicated by a general lack of labour.²⁶ Through a combination of government inertia and lack of political will to transform the area (unlike recent efforts being projected through LAPSSSET) multiple attempts to recruit labourers failed, and as a result, the government decided to abolish the plantation altogether, creating a settlement scheme of 10.3-acre plots instead.²⁷ Interviews with residents of the settlement scheme suggest that its establishment was motivated by the need to create a solution to the land problem in Central Kenya.²⁸ In this way, while the first to be settled were the local workers of the defunct Cotton Lint and Seed-Marketing board that had been running the plantation, including some local Bajuni, Sanye, Boni and Giriama, the majority of the settlement scheme's current residents – Kikuyus with origins from Kenya's central highlands – arrived between 1973 and 1975, taking up residence in what would be called the Lake Kenyatta Settlement Scheme.²⁹

A town called Mpeketoni grew out of the settlement scheme. But, initially, 'it was like a village in a forest. It was not a town until 1986, when GTZ [German Technical Cooperation Agency] came, and did the town planning, and the roads, and brought water, that farming begun to thrive.'³⁰ As a result of this, Mpeketoni's population grew rapidly during the 1990s, quickly surpassing that of smaller villages around it. From 1997, the success of the Lake Kenyatta settlement scheme at Mpeketoni saw the establishment of three more schemes on the mainland, and four on the

islands.³¹ In these settlement schemes, a trend with later consequences on local politics was established, whereby a majority of the beneficiaries of the schemes on the islands were Bajuni, and their counterparts on the mainland were Kikuyu. Interviews with both Kikuyu and Bajuni residents suggest that on the mainland areas, requests by the local Bajuni for plot allocation were also granted, especially since the 1990s.³² However, non-Bajuni opinion suggests that the Bajuni beneficiaries did not cultivate, or occupy the land.

They did not go there, they have title deeds, but they did not go ... they sold the plots, others they just left as forests until today ... they didn't go there ... it's like they were given air that they did not even see.³³

Such opinion, central in local narratives regarding the virtues of work and cultivation, emerges out of wider moral discourses by cultivator groups such as the Kikuyu that are often deployed to negotiate belonging in a country of recent migration, and where ethnicity and land are inextricably linked.³⁴ This is significant for Lamu, where wider territorial restructuring processes witnessed elsewhere in Northern Kenya, such as increased sedentarization and intensification of land use, driven especially by the spread of rain-fed agriculture, and other claims of community-based land ownership (such as the establishment of ranches and conservancies), have vividly intersected, intensifying competition over land and resources.³⁵

While the Kikuyu constitute the bulk of Lamu's mainland population since the 1970s, it is important to note that they have been joined (especially since the early 2000s) by smaller numbers of communities from other parts of Kenya.³⁶ Through cultivation and settlement, and despite lacking formal title to their plots, these recent inhabitants of Lamu have 'opened-up' parts of the mainland that have remained largely uninhabited since the early 1900s. This recent pattern of migration has not only led to increasing disagreements over land ownership, boundaries and access to valuable land-based resources, but it is also reshaping the meaning of land and belonging.³⁷

The result is a growing prominence of autochthonous discourses in local political debates, where ideas of ethnic territoriality, common in other parts of Kenya, are engendering an understating of ethnic others as 'immigrants' and 'guests'. In such contexts, driven by common perceptions of how ethnicity, land and redistribution are intertwined in Kenya, commonplace terms such as *wageni* (guests) and *wenyeji* (hosts), are gaining wide currency, as political, social and economic processes generate uncertainty, and competition for resources between 'guests' and 'hosts' intensifies.³⁸ These processes of accumulation, sedentarization and claims making, have been amplified by the anticipation of LAPSSET, as was noted by the first Lamu County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) for the period 2013–17, which states, 'challenges facing Lamu is population growth owing to migration into Lamu from other parts of the country, fuelled partly by the anticipated opportunities accruing from the Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor.'³⁹

In Lamu, these 'challenges' have occasioned widespread demands for the formalization of land claims, for monetary compensation of land (and sea) that is earmarked for LAPSSET projects, and for the protection and preservation of diverse cultures and livelihoods – all of which are negotiated through reimagined ideas of belonging and citizenship, related especially, to questions of who gets what, where, when and how.⁴⁰ Such

questions, as will be shown below, do not only promise to determine the future distribution of economic, agricultural and other resources in Lamu and elsewhere within the LAPSET corridor, but also who will be included or excluded from LAPSET's promised prosperous future.

Making property and claiming land

The official launch of LAPSET on 2 March 2012 at a village called Kililana in Lamu was accompanied by widespread concerns and fears regarding the fate of land in Lamu. This was informed by wide circulating rumours of a 'land grab' in neighbouring Tana-River, where proposals by a plethora of international companies to establish sugarcane plantations and oil seed crops were accentuating pre-existing communal tensions over land-use change, leading to inter-communal conflict in 2012, where more than 160 lives were lost.⁴¹ One of the companies mentioned in the slated land acquisitions in Tana-River, Mat International, had recently acquired 3,200 acres of land for sugarcane growing in Lamu.⁴² Local protests ensued, and the allocation was revoked, after which the land was handed over to the defunct Lamu county council for reallocation for public uses.

It was at this time that the scope of the LAPSET agenda in Lamu was becoming clearer, and again, media reports were awash with rumours of a 'Lamu land grab', where people, acutely aware of the possibilities for wealth creation through land ownership in Kenya, wanted to own a piece of the modernized port-city of the future.⁴³ As a result, Lamu was reframed in national and local discursive frameworks as a county of anticipated economic potential. Enclosures and informal demarcations emerged in cleared and forested areas, and advertisements of 'plots for sale' – some of which were sent to this author in 2012 – were widely shared and circulated through text messages and social media platforms.⁴⁴

Revolving around the defunct Lamu county council, these anticipations created multiple networks cutting across familiar fault-lines of class, ethnicity, gender, religion and race: as petty land-brokers, bureaucrats, local farmers, traders, politicians, international investors, etc., all came together to create an economy of land speculation that was steeped into the promise of a lucrative future in Lamu.⁴⁵ However, it was not until June-July 2014, when gunmen linked to Somalia-based Al-Shabaab attacked Mpeketoni town and its environs, and killed close to ninety people, that the full extent of this economy of land speculation in Lamu would be publically revealed.⁴⁶ The president, Uhuru Kenyatta – made to believe that land speculative practices, and wider claims of a 'Lamu land grab' had motivated the attacks – revoked formal titles that were allegedly issued to a total of 22 companies between 2011 and 2012.⁴⁷ These titles, an audit by the Ministry of Lands claimed, covered 500,000 acres of land, or 70% of all land in Lamu that was available for settlement.⁴⁸ Some of it included land on which 12 of the proposed 32 berths of the new port would be built. In a presentation that she made during a meeting at State House, Nairobi – between the President and a delegation of political and religious leaders from Lamu – the then Minister for Lands, Ms. Charity Ngilu, stated that 'in the [yet to be built] special economic zone, they were 18 parcels of land, each 500 acres, that were in the process of being issued to private companies, but we [were] able to infiltrate the process and stop it.'⁴⁹ Further investigations by the National Land Commission (NLC), the commission tasked with allocations of public land,

recommended the retention of only one title deed, regularizing six, and reverting the rest back to the government.⁵⁰

While the politics surrounding the revocation of titles (and the investigations that followed) revealed who was involved in land speculation in Lamu – matters that were perhaps already well known to the county's residents – they also signified the changing meaning of land as property. One farmer stated:

People did not know the true value of title deeds ... we were just following the traditions of *dini* [religion: Islam]. People just knew that you can't grab land from your neighbour. People knew the boundaries, which were marked by trees ... [...] If these trees fell, the elders would just come and measure the boundaries with footsteps.⁵¹

Other residents claimed that local demands for the privatization and formal allocation of land and plots begun with increased migration and settlement in Lamu since the 1990s, but it was not until the announcement of LAPSET in 2009 that the desire by people to formally own individual plots took a radical turn. A local resident explained:

There are people who came and bought the land and they don't live here. Maybe there are in South Africa, they are in Nairobi. So, we went there, [to an area in the planned port city] after they [state officials] came, and we adjudicated the land and allocated it to ourselves ... because it is ours and we don't have land and we are the residents here. We surveyed the place ourselves and the [Lamu county] governor promised that he will issue us with title deeds.⁵²

Combined with ubiquitous calls and expectations of monetary compensation for occupied public land that is earmarked for LAPSET activities, such demands (especially by people who saw themselves as 'indigenous' to Lamu, such as the Bajuni, Boni and Sanye) were also couched in exclusivist discourses about 'knowing' and 'belonging' to the soil.⁵³ In a country where identity and land are inexorably linked, these claims to 'belong' as autochthonous 'sons of the soil' were more often than not, synonymous with narratives of ethnic territorial exclusion.⁵⁴ In Lamu, as elsewhere in Kenya, such narratives were providing the dominant language for debating belonging and citizenship. In such a place, of recent migration and settlement, these debates were also becoming more public and bitter, as people sought to secure land (and other land-based resources) in the context of LAPSET's promised future. Recently settled residents of Lamu are claiming land (and therefore political rights), not through autochthony, as most have 'come' from elsewhere in Kenya, but through other managerial arguments, 'to have improved the land, to have brought civilisation, and sometimes, to simply have been born and raised there',⁵⁵ as was stated by a resident of the Lake Kenyatta settlement scheme:

I have nowhere to go and call my own except for Lamu ... I was born here ... I went to school here, I was raised here, I got married here, my children were born here, my parents are still here ... what concerns me are the claims by some people that we are guests ... I wonder how many years one needs to live in a place until people can accept that [they] too belong.⁵⁶

Negotiations of claims to land and territory through exclusivist discourses of belonging notwithstanding, these struggles around land in Lamu have also led to what Borrás and Franco have referred to as 'broad types of political conflicts' within and between the state and social forces.⁵⁷ In Lamu, this has been fuelled especially by conflicting interests and aspirations within and between social groups and government departments, regarding

especially the establishment of conservancies since the mid-2000s. Mosley and Watson contend that in Lamu and elsewhere along the proposed LAPSSET corridor, conservancies have been formed in opposition to, and in anticipation of the perceived threats and opportunities represented by LAPSSET.⁵⁸ For instance, majority of the allocations of public land that were revoked by President Uhuru Kenyatta in August 2014 had been issued to ranches, some of which, through the help of global networks of funding, had been turned into community conservancies. The introduction of these new forms of territoriality and land-use change, where ‘we are bringing new ideas of conservation to the community ... encouraging them to conserve, rather than hunt the animals,’⁵⁹ have engendered new forms of conflict, between and within ethnic communities and government departments, especially forestry, police and lands officials: as movement across conservancy borders is hampered, and as contentiously defined ‘local communities’ become more closely linked to bounded areas.⁶⁰

In this way, discourses of ‘knowing’ and ‘belonging’ to land are not only underpinning notions of belonging, but are also deployed in the establishment of conservancies, which are presented by their promoters as mobilizations of ‘indigenous’ knowledge for the purposes of better management of land and natural resources.⁶¹ By tapping into globalized channels of funding – where an obsession with ‘indigeneity’ currently exists – conservancies controlling vast amounts of territory are providing local actors (who have been excluded in national political structures, but are excluding others from local territory and natural resources) the means to push back against LAPSSET, with demands for more local influence and control.⁶² A good example are the leaders of the Amu Ranch conservancy, which sits on 63,000 acres of land on the mainland, and is managed with the help of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust.⁶³ Despite the Trust’s claims, that it has ‘empowered local communities in securing their future by protecting their biological diversity, safeguarding their culture and traditions and sustainably managing their natural resources on land and sea’,⁶⁴ local opinion suggests that the conservancy is not far from contestation. A resident of Pangani, a village next to the ranch, stated:

The conservancy ranch, they claim that this is their area ... they have invaded our land ... they have really bothered us ... they have sent the police to beat us, they have taken our farming implements, my uncle has been arrested a number of times ... [...] Yet we received letters from the lands office allowing us to live here ... how come today they have a ranch, where did these ranches come from, why are there ranches everywhere, where will we live?⁶⁵

The next section examines how narratives of territorialized identity, that have been used to strengthen moral and legal claims to land and resources through wide ranging strategies – from autochthony to the establishment of conservancies – are intersecting with ideas of historical marginalization, and ecological and livelihood vulnerability. In particular, the section examines how these discourses of ‘indigeneity’ are creating new domains of action and influence, and are cultivating new channels of patronage, all driven by anticipations of LAPSSET’s future, and which promise to determine who will benefit in that future.

Anticipating future livelihoods

A week before the LAPSSET ground-breaking ceremony, which was held on 2 March 2012 at Kililana in Lamu, a letter was addressed to the then President of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki,

that was signed by 1,000 people claiming to represent local community-based organizations, jointly calling themselves the ‘Save Lamu’ coalition. Listing concerns over communal safeguards, community consultation, environmental protection, and the fate of customary natural resource management, the letter’s authors emphasized that they were not opposed to LAPSET, but asked that the government shares all information regarding the corridor.⁶⁶ Specifically, the authors of the letter demanded a comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment, and the involvement of ‘local communities’ in the planning and implementation of LAPSET.⁶⁷ By using the new constitutional dispensation – which after 2010, had energized a public language of accountability, public participation and livelihood protection – and taking advantage of a regime that was keen on placating its neighbours, especially newly-independent South Sudan (whose vast oil reserves had provided the main impetus for LAPSET at the time); the residents of Lamu were seizing the moment of the highly publicized ground-breaking ceremony so as to seek concessions (and reassurances) from the government.⁶⁸

The idea of a coalition of local CBOs (the ‘Save Lamu’ coalition was registered in 2011) had been in existence since 2009, after some leaders associated with the Amu Ranch Conservancy met officials of the South African NGO, Natural Justice, with the express purpose of developing a ‘bio-cultural community protocol’, or BCP.⁶⁹ Many definitions exist, all of which suggest that a BCP is a non-legally binding instrument prepared by ‘indigenous’ communities that codifies their management of and interaction with their environment, and is usually used to ensure that external actors (government, researchers, NGOs) respect customary laws, values and decision-making processes, particularly those concerning the stewardship of ‘indigenous’ territories and areas.⁷⁰ While BCP’s have emerged as a response to the global ecological crisis, two features in Lamu have lent such discourses prominence: its long history of settlement (especially on the archipelago), combined with years of government neglect that have left people dependent on traditional knowledge systems when it comes to environmental management and livelihood adaptation. In particular, Lamu’s status as a UNESCO world-heritage site has given such concerns primacy and a sense of urgency.

In the context of LAPSET, the mission of ‘Save Lamu’ also constitutes part of locally-driven mechanisms for provision of alternatives (or push-backs) against the scientific ordering of nature and society that is embedded within LAPSET’s high-modernist visions. For instance, local actors associated with ‘Save Lamu’ have deployed multidimensional traditional knowledge systems that they claim have been transmitted culturally through generations over centuries; that provide a better understanding of local and interconnected patterns and processes over large spatial and temporal scales; such as insights into the effects on mangrove harvesting; cycles of resource availability within forests; and shifts in climate or ecosystem structure and function.⁷¹ This traditional ecological knowledge over space and resources has been deployed against specific components of the LAPSET project (for example, on levels of turbidity caused by dredging at the port site), but most commonly, these have been tied to wider demands for comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments over the entire spectrum of nature and livelihoods that will be affected by LAPSET.⁷²

The fear, especially amongst a section of the predominantly Muslim Bajuni, is that the modernizing forces within LAPSET’s imagined future may work to wipe out, not only Lamu’s ecological diversity, but the livelihoods of its ‘indigenous’ populations. This is

informed by years of minimal access to technology, agricultural commercialization and formal education: as ‘it is people from elsewhere [with formal education, skills and therefore influence], not us the locals, that will be employed at the port and the other companies that will come.’⁷³ A rather remarkable comment was the suggestion that ‘before the LAPSSET projects begin, photographs [depicting] the way we live now should be taken and curated in a museum so as to enable future generations to see how we used to live before LAPSSET.’⁷⁴ In this manner, deployments of ‘indigenous’ knowledge and alternative visions are associated with claims of historical exclusion, and therefore potential marginalization by a Nairobi-led process.

Similar to other parts of the Kenyan coast, where a litany of historical grievances has animated local politics since the decolonization era, Lamu residents have complained about low public investment in education and physical infrastructure, lack of requisite government support in traditional farming, fishing, mangrove harvesting and tourism, including common perceptions (especially amongst the predominantly Muslim Bajuni) of being treated as outsiders within Kenya’s formal system.⁷⁵ Perhaps, as a result, Lamu registers lower numbers compared to national averages of people who have attained secondary education and above, despite its favourable listing at number 6 out of 47 counties in recent poverty estimates (See Table 1). In terms of the quality of education, Lamu has been ranked 30th and 35th out of 47 counties for primary and secondary education respectively.⁷⁶ In addition, the local distribution of schools suggest that they are concentrated on the mainland areas where there are fewer Muslim Bajuni, such that the high literacy level rate of 70% is thought to mainly represent, ‘the highly “exposed” residents of Lamu West [predominantly mainland] sub-county.’⁷⁷

Following from this precedent, discourses of indigeneity and associated expectations by a majority of the Bajuni (or those who see themselves as ‘indigenous’ to Lamu) – that they should be allocated primacy in resource distribution – are not examples of resistance to LAPSSET, but are part of the local strategies for reassurances against future exclusion. In this context, asked if he was opposed to LAPSSET, a Bajuni resident on the mainland areas said, ‘we want the port, but we don’t want it to be like Mombasa port, where the locals [Bajuni] are engaged in odd-jobs, while outsiders sit in the offices.’⁷⁸ It was this concern that informed the decision by local Bajuni leaders to request that the government provides scholarships to students from Lamu (training them in various courses relevant for port and related operations) in anticipation of the future employment opportunities that will be generated by LAPSSET.⁷⁹

Table 1. Poverty estimates and percentage distribution of population aged 3 years and above by Highest Level of education reached.

County	Poverty estimates – Headcount rate (%)	Secondary (%)	College (Middle Level) (%)	University (%)
Lamu	28.5	15.1	2.6	1.2
Nairobi	16.7	31.0	14.2	9.5
Meru	19.4	17.8	4.6	2.0
Nyeri	19.3	28.7	6.7	2.9
Kirinyaga	20	26.7	4.5	1.8
Narok	22.6	14.9	4.0	2.1
National	36.1	22.4	5.7	3.2

Note: Open access data provided by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey*, March 2018.

For other groups, especially farmers residing on the mainland areas, bio-cultural community protocols are unnecessary aberrations on the path to development and agricultural commercialization, 'it's like the people of Lamu want Lamu to forever become a museum,' one resident argued.⁸⁰ Here again, one sees contending communal visions about progress and civilization at work, pitying the recently settled residents of the mainland areas versus the Bajuni who dominate the islands. However, opinion regarding the future of LAPSET is not unanimous even on the mainland areas, as for people without formalized individual ownership of land, LAPSET may bring benefits but as discussed above, will also create risks of 'land-grabbing', limiting people's livelihood options.⁸¹

Such diverse anticipations are based upon a composite of present socio-economic challenges: difficulty in accessing credit, inputs and markets for farmers' produce due to lack of formal out-grower arrangements, and increasing farmer-herder conflicts over water and land-based resources, amongst others.⁸² Most significant to point out, however, is that the negotiation and articulation of such concerns is intersecting with local politics, especially questions regarding who belongs to Lamu, and therefore, holds primacy over the rights and benefits of its anticipated prosperous future under LAPSET. The next section examines how such questions are influencing local patterns of political mobilization.

The politics of belonging in a high-modernist future

Politics in Lamu took an interesting turn in 2013, with the coming into power of the first county government, consisting of its own executive and legislative arm (county assembly). Before 2013, local politics, and related access to rights and local resources, had revolved around the defunct (and poorly funded) Lamu county council, including a number of individuals who were associated with ruling parties based in Nairobi. One of them, a prominent Arab businessman called Tahir Sheikh Said (commonly known as T.S.S.), who was also the Lamu branch chairman of the former ruling party (the Kenya African National Union, or KANU) between 1992 and 2002, funded the campaigns of politicians who went on to parliament to represent Lamu's two constituencies, Lamu West and Lamu East.⁸³ Fahim Twaha, who represented Lamu West from 1997 to 2013, was widely thought to be the main beneficiary of T.S.S.'s patronage, as he was also T.S.S.'s son-in-law.⁸⁴ His record in winning elections was broken only in 2013, when he presented himself for the first gubernatorial contest for the newly-created office of County Governor, and lost to Issa Timamy, a newcomer to Lamu politics (but by no means without social status) who won with a slight margin of 1,959 votes.⁸⁵

One of Timamy's first decisions while in office was to disband the LAPSET Steering Committee, a body that was created in 2012 by local leaders and LAPSET officials, and which was meant to involve Lamu residents in LAPSET's decision-making process.⁸⁶ The committee had received official recognition, and according to a member, was behind the proposal for 1,000 government scholarships for students from Lamu so as to prepare them to take up job opportunities at the port. As explained by one of its members, the committee was dissolved due to political differences between Fahim Twaha and Issa Timamy:

When the governor [Issa Timamy] came in, he disbanded the committee. It was politics, because most of the members had been Twaha's campaigners ... [...] So Timamy and

other elected leaders went to Kasuku [LAPSSET Chief Executive Officer] and said that because they were elected, they had more power than the committee. So, they disbanded the committee.⁸⁷

Important to note, is that Timamy's first tenure in office was not only complicated by a series of legal cases, as his detractors challenged his 2013 electoral victory in court, but was also marked by competing factional interests – as various groups attempted, with varying degrees of success, to retain control of some nominal structures of the county government.⁸⁸ In addition to this, were a range of diverse and competing claims on land and resources, around which questions of identity and belonging, and of the future of LAPSSET in Lamu, were debated.⁸⁹ In this debate, particular emphasis was placed on the establishment of settlement schemes on the mainland areas of Lamu, especially since the 1990s, where 59,084 more acres of land (in addition to the 35,120 acres that were issued at the Lake Kenyatta Settlement Scheme Phase 1 in the 1970s) were allocated to 2,991 households, compared to only 15,746 acres that were allocated to 4,123 households on the Bajuni dominated islands.⁹⁰

The fact that a majority of the beneficiaries were Kikuyu had entrenched local Bajuni perceptions of exclusion, and further engendered autochthonous discourses of belonging.⁹¹ In addition, since most of the allocations were made under the tenure of Fahim Twaha (when he was MP for Lamu West which covers the mainland areas), local perceptions from as early as 2002 was that Twaha was a promoter of the interests of recently settled residents of Lamu at the expense of the Bajuni.⁹² In fact, to win the votes of the increasing Kikuyu population on the mainland, Twaha had tapped into a widely established discourse of ethnicity and political party in Kenya, and successfully sought the nomination of parties – during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 elections – that had a major following amongst Kikuyus elsewhere in the country. Therefore, in addition to the perception that Timamy was edging out the networks that had revolved around Fahim Twaha and the former Lamu county council, his self-cultivated public image as a defender of public land in Lamu was from 2013 to 2017 interpreted as part of his responsiveness to increasing Bajuni discontent regarding migration and settlement into Lamu by people from other parts of Kenya.⁹³

Firstly, Timamy's administration placed attention on irregular land allocations. A good example are the investigations of irregular allocations of sand dunes, or water-catchment areas, located on the southern parts of Lamu island, which Timamy had initiated during his previous position as the Chairperson of the National Museums of Kenya.⁹⁴ In 2013, Timamy invited the NLC to take up the investigation, and by February 2017, the NLC was threatening the revocation of over 117 title deeds issued for land in the area.⁹⁵ The names of the individuals that had been allocated deeds to the sand dunes were published by the NLC, and it included people who had served in the defunct Lamu county council, local bureaucrats and politicians, including Fahim Twaha, T.S.S, and Omar Twalib, a co-founder of the Amu Ranch Conservancy and Twaha's immediate predecessor in the Lamu West parliamentary seat.⁹⁶

Secondly, Timamy sought greater political control of the LAPSSET agenda. For instance, Timamy's county administration approved the allocation of 11,100 acres of public land at Kiongwe village on the mainland to an American energy company, Cordisons Limited – for the establishment of a wind-power generating project – without consulting the NLC, which is legally mandated to allocate public land.⁹⁷ After the NLC issued

a separate lease for 3,206 acres of land to another company in the same area for a similar project, Cordisons, supported by Timamy's administration, sued the NLC, but lost the case.⁹⁸ Despite this, Timamy's tussle with the NLC continued, and in early 2016, he rejected the NLC's allocation of 28,000 acres of land in Lamu for LAPSET, accusing the NLC of failing to consult his county administration while making the allocation.⁹⁹ Adding to the chagrin of the NLC, Timamy went ahead to involve his county administration in matters of land compensation for people occupying land earmarked for LAPSET activities.¹⁰⁰ The resulting fragmentation of authority, associated with competing multiple interests, not only led to the creation of three different lists of names of project affected persons (before a final list was agreed upon), but created opportunities for individuals and groups that aligned themselves to benefit from the anticipated monetary compensation for the land.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Timamy's struggles with the national government regarding the fate of LAPSET in Lamu was generating considerable local hostility against his county administration, especially amongst those individuals and groups that had long benefited from the networks that Timamy had edged out of the instruments of local governance since 2013. On one level, there existed claims that his county government was excluding Lamu's residents on the mainland areas, and on another, that his actions were causing delays to projects that required land, and hence, would meet popular expectations for monetary compensation for land that was occupied, but would be required for the projects.¹⁰² Claims of local exclusion, especially of non-Bajuni interests, and failures to meet popular expectations regarding LAPSET, constituted the central discursive thread within local politics on the run-up to the 2017 general-elections. Twaha, who would win the gubernatorial elections with a narrow margin of 547 votes, stated during his campaigns:

The governor [Timamy] has been favouring some areas of the county. People in Mpeketoni [mainland] are left out. He has also failed to unite the Lamu people. People are seeing each other as Kikuyus, Bajunis ... instead of Kenyans living in one county.¹⁰³

Timamy denied these allegations, but his brief police arrest in July 2014 (after the June-July Al-Shabaab attacks), which was largely the result of testimony issued by residents on the mainland areas, revealed what local actors who felt alienated by Timamy's county administration were willing to do so as to regain local control and influence, and with this, secure a place within LAPSET's promised future.¹⁰⁴ The extent of the divide between the population resident in the mainland and the islands, which closely aligned with the multiple perceptions of LAPSET in Lamu, was exemplified by the electoral results of the 2017 gubernatorial elections. While Fahim Twaha was declared winner, Timamy won 63% of the votes in the predominantly Bajuni Lamu East constituency, and Twaha received 53% of votes in the Kikuyu-dominated Lamu West.¹⁰⁵

This division of interests – between those who are seen as 'guests' in Lamu, and those who consider themselves as 'hosts' – was further demonstrated by the fact that Timamy won in all the electoral wards of Lamu West where the Bajunis are the majority, and lost in all the wards dominated by the Kikuyu.¹⁰⁶ For instance, in the mainland electoral ward of Hongwe where the Kikuyu form a distinctive majority, Timamy received a paltry 422 votes (or 13% of votes cast), while Twaha got 2,649 votes (or 81% of votes cast). As such, the 2017 elections provided a field upon which diverse actors and interests competed for space, power and influence in Lamu, which would then determine who gets what, when

and how, questions that were amplified with the economies of anticipation that were being generated by LAPSET's promised future.

Conclusion

Economies of anticipation, as shown in this article, underscore the complex nature of responses 'from below' that arise when capital (and the state) are extended into rural and marginal areas.¹⁰⁷ Yet much of the literature emphasises the domination, expulsion or resistance of 'local communities' that results from rural development programmes or large-scale infrastructural projects.¹⁰⁸ This article, however, has shown how, when such projects 'hit the ground' they can interact in complex ways with social groups within the local state and society, in ways 'that are differentiated along class, gender, generation, ethnicity and nationality, and that have historically specific expectations, aspirations and traditions of struggle.'¹⁰⁹

In addressing a wider literature on large-scale development and land-based investments in the 'Global South', the article, therefore, submits that *dispossession*, *state domination* and *local resistance* are common outcomes, but adds that in contexts where investments are yet to happen, and where an epistemic rift between the cultural repertoires of the state and/or bearers of capital and *local communities* does not exist, the outcome is much more complex and varied. Focussing on Lamu, the article has shown how these local dynamics produce diverse responses involving multiple actors, with different consequences.

Drawing from recent investigations of the actual operation of state power and capital on the ground, the article shows how, in some cases, opportunities are availed to hitherto excluded actors, amidst concerns of potential exclusion. In sum, acknowledging that *local communities* are more often than not made up of a diverse range of social actors, reveals – and helps to explain – the complex economies of anticipation around a promised prosperous future. The latter – it was argued – will determine the future distribution of economic, agricultural, and other resources along the corridor, influencing who will be included or excluded from the benefits that LAPSET promises.

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108. For example, Regassa and Korf. "Post-Imperial Statecraft"; Buffavand, "The Land Does not Like them"; Chinigo, "Decentralisation"; Planel, "A View."
109. Hall et al., "Resistance," 468.

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